65p

# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

156

The Oz factor
Reality: a Fortean view
The great psi debate
A healthy forecast?
Modern myths

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# THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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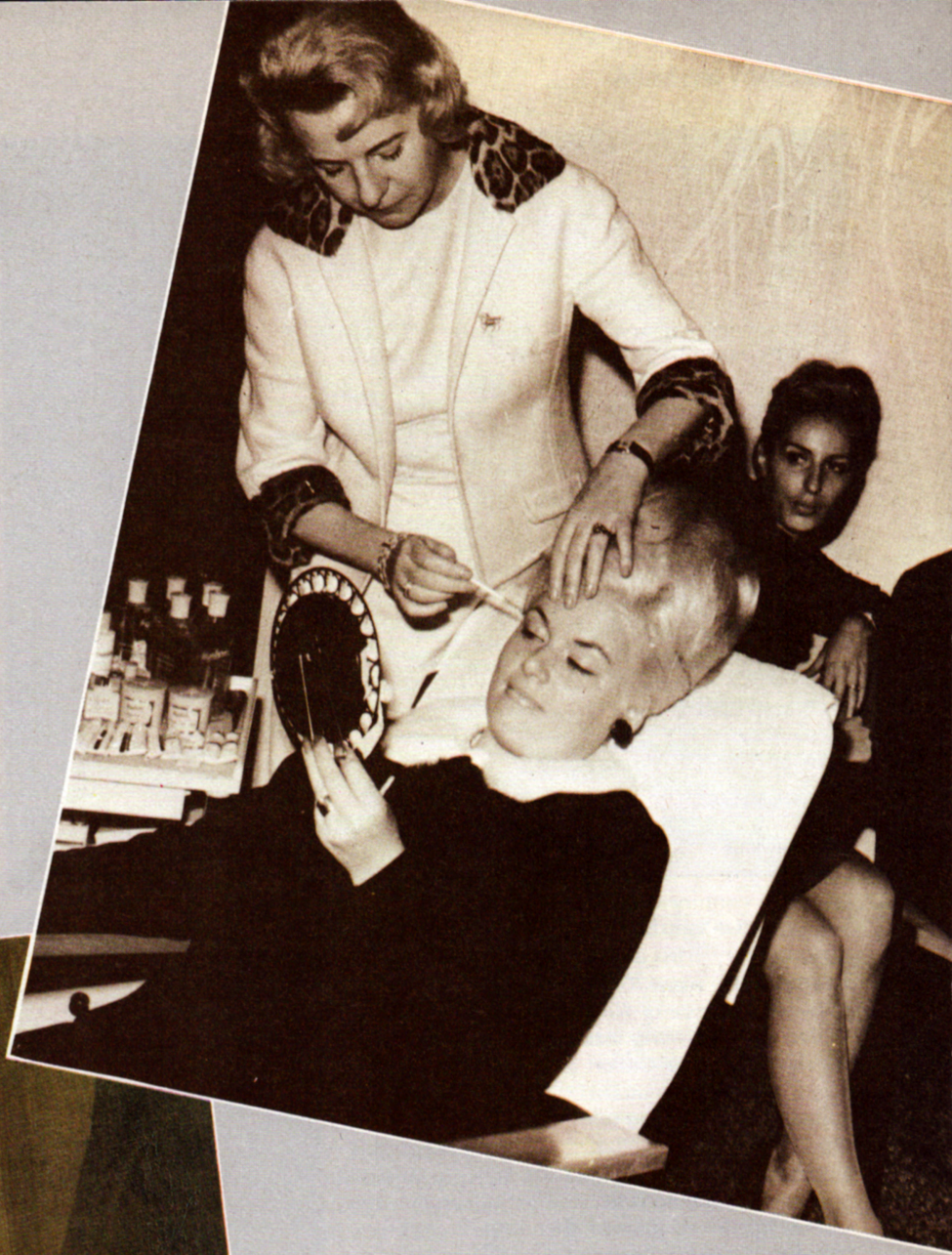
# Once upon a time

**Everyone has heard – in pubs, clubs or locker rooms – the kind of story that begins 'Well this is a true story . . . it happened to my cousin's boyfriend's little sister.' PAUL SMITH examines the authenticity of such tales, their origins and how they spread**

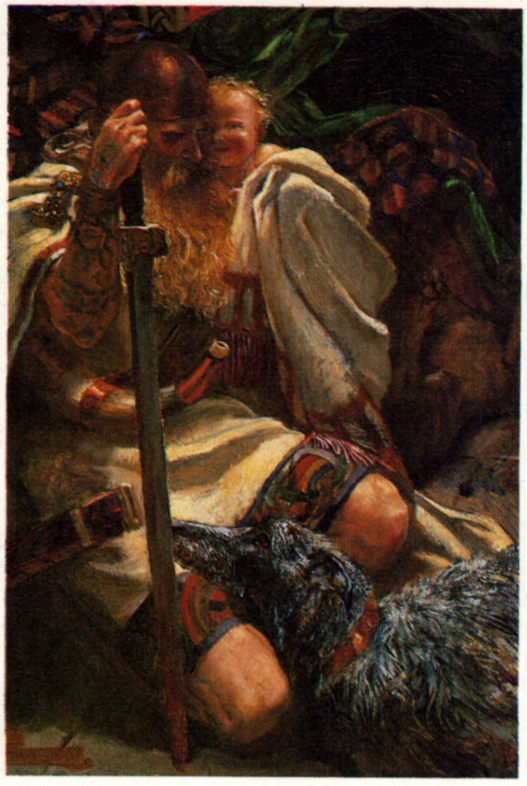


AN ENGLISH FAMILY was spending a camping holiday in Spain, complete with grandmother, when suddenly – overcome by the heat, upset by the strange food, or simply succumbing to old age – the grandmother collapsed and died. Not wishing to bury her in a foreign country, and hoping to avoid the bureaucratic wrangles that were bound to ensue if they declared a dead body at customs, the family decided simply to wrap it in tarpaulins and lash it to the car roofrack. All went well until they stopped to eat at a restaurant a little short of the French border. On leaving the restaurant, the family was horrified to discover that the car had been stolen – complete with the grandmother's corpse! Neither car nor body was ever found.

This tale may sound familiar, and not surprisingly: similar stories are constantly related in pubs, clubs, at parties and in locker rooms. Generally they happen to 'a friend of a friend' or 'my friend's cousin's girlfriend'. Rarely is the individual who is telling the story the person involved in the incident – and here lies a clue, for many of the events described in the stories never actually happened.

For instance, have you heard about the girl, back in the 1960s, who had a magnificent beehive hairdo? She was very proud of it, and kept it perfect by never washing her hair, but simply lacquering it to make it keep its shape. One day, sitting in a milk bar, she suddenly keeled over dead – and it turned out from the post-mortem examination that bees had made their nest in her hair and had finally

Previous page: the finishing touches are applied to the appearance of a model, complete with bouffant hairstyle, at a 1965 fashion show (top). A story often told in pubs and clubs concerns a girl who kept her beehive hairstyle perfect by never washing it, but simply lacquering it again and again. One day she fell down dead – apparently because bees that had made their nest in her hair had gnawed through her skull to her brain. This tale appears to originate in the era of beehive hairstyles of the 1950s and 1960s – but was also extant in the 18th century, when bouffant hairstyles were fashionable (bottom). And a 13th-century manuscript preserves a version of the same tale



Above right: an illustration of the 13th-century Welsh legend of Gellert, by the 19th-century artist John Byam Liston Shaw. One day Llewellyn, Prince of North Wales, went hunting leaving his faithful hound Gellert at home to guard his infant son. On his return he was greeted by a gory Gellert standing by a bloodstained cot – and, thinking that Gellert had killed his son, he plunged his sword into the dog's side. Only then did he notice his son, safe and sound – and a huge wolf lying dead by the cot. This legend now circulates in the form of a story of a woman who comes home to find her dog choking on two fingers bitten from the hand of an intruder who is later found hiding in a cupboard

gnawed through her skull to her brain.

A chilling story, certainly, but it is doubtful whether it ever happened. Bees live on pollen, not on human flesh, and if they *had* made their hive inside the girl's hair, one would have expected to see them flying in and out as they foraged for food. And wouldn't she have heard them buzzing? One suspects that the reference to bees was simply suggested by the name of the bouffant hairstyle – 'beehive'. And the discovery that the same story has been reported, with minor variations, over hundreds of years in different locations lends substance to this suspicion. The insects in the hair are most often bees – but sometimes they are cockroaches or, more convincingly, black widow spiders.

The story was reported – without supporting evidence – in *Esquire* magazine in March 1976, as an example of teenage 'Folklore from the Fifties':

> A girl managed to wrap her hair into a perfect beehive. Proud of her accomplishment, she kept spraying it and spraying it, never bothering to wash it again. Bugs began to live in her hair. After about six months, they ate through to her brain and killed her.
>
> MORAL: wash your hair or die.

What is perhaps still more extraordinary is that virtually the same story appears in a 13th-century *exemplum* – a moral tale and, like the *Esquire* example, a warning against vanity in women. It appears in the *Speculum laicorum* ('Mirror for the laity'), a book of improving texts for churchgoers.

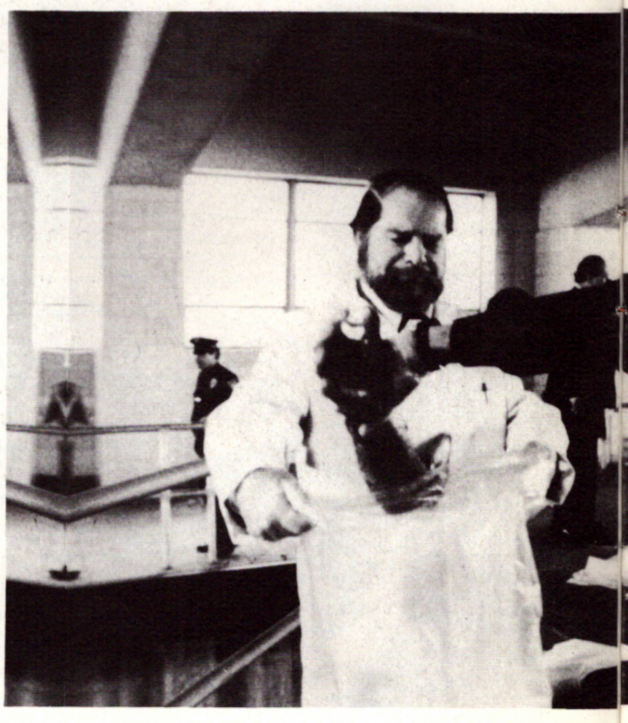
> There is a sermon story of a certain lady of Eynesham, in Oxfordshire, 'who took so long over the adornment of her hair that she used to arrive at church barely before the end of Mass.' One day 'the devil descended upon her head in the form of a spider, gripping with its legs,' until she well-nigh died of fright. Nothing would remove the offending insect, neither prayer, nor exorcism, nor holy water, until the local abbot displayed the holy sacrament before it.

This story is far from being alone in the fact that its origins can be traced back for hundreds of years. The story of the vanishing hitch-hiker, too, is an ancient one whose roots reach back into the traditional folklores of cultures as geographically widespread as the United States, Britain, Sweden, Malaysia, Sicily, Pakistan and South Africa (see page 1706). It seems, too, that we must include the reports of visits by men in black (see page 510) in this category – for, whether or not they are true, the stories appear in startlingly similar forms all over the world.

### Fact or fiction?

What is it that makes these stories so persistent? They are always told as true – but in the absence of any substantiating evidence, it is extraordinary that many of them have persisted for hundreds of years. They may once have had a basis in fact – but have now become what folklorists term legends.

Legends can be described as traditional narratives that, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the historic past. As such they contrast sharply with myths – narratives that are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in some distant and heroic past – and with folk tales, which are regarded as fiction and told primarily for entertainment. Legends generally focus attention on local people and places, events and



Right: a still from the 1980 movie *Motel hell*. The plot is centred on a story that occurs repeatedly in contemporary legend: guests in a motel or hotel are killed, sawn up and served as meat

Below: an alligator with its young in the Everglades National Park, Florida, USA. A persistent rumour alleges that visitors to the Everglades bring baby alligators home to New York as pets; growing tired of them, they flush them down the toilet. As a consequence, the New York sewers are full of huge alligators. The 1980 movie *Alligator* (bottom) made use of this story: here Detective Madison, played by Robert Forster, realises something is afoot when human limbs – in this case an arm – are recovered from the sewers

situations – and as such constitute a form of traditional narrative that is still very much alive in the 20th century. Folklorists call legends that deal with the immediate past contemporary legends – and study of them in Great Britain and the United States reveals how astonishingly widespread occurrences of the same tale may be.

One of the best-known of such stories, instances of which have been collected all over the United States and in Britain, is known as the 'hook' story. It concerns a teenage couple who have driven to the local 'lovers' lane' to listen to music on the radio and indulge in a little pubescent sex. Suddenly the music is interrupted by an announcement: there is an escaped convict in the area, who is serving time for rape and robbery; he is described as having a hook instead of a right hand. The girl is frightened, and wants to go home; her partner interprets this as rejection of his advances, turns on the ignition, puts his foot down hard on the accelerator, and they roar off. When they arrive back in town and the girl gets out of the car, she finds on the door handle a bloody hook.

This tale is among the best-known and most widespread to have been studied by folklorists. Generally the 'lovers' lane' in which it is situated is a real place in the locality; and inevitably, it happened to 'my friend's cousin's boyfriend'. The earliest examples of the story date from the 1950s; it is one of those legends that surfaces, dies away, and surfaces again in exactly the same form years later.

Why is it told? It is, of course, a good story, with the classic ingredients of suspense, sex, fear and mutilation; it has a kind of ghastly plausibility – and, perhaps most important, it is, like the beehive hairdo story, a moral tale with a warning. On 8 November 1960 the story appeared in a letter included in a popular newspaper column written by Abigail Van Buren. The letter began, 'Dear Abby, If you are interested in teenagers, you will print this story. I don't know whether it's true or not, but it doesn't matter because it served its purpose for me.' A graphic account of the 'hook' story followed, and the letter ended, 'I don't think I will ever park to make out as long as I live. I hope this does the same for other kids.'

Other warning tales concern new technological inventions with which people are still less than familiar. A widespread story of this kind is that of the young man who is staying at his aunt's house while she is on holiday to look after her beloved cat. During a dreadful storm the cat stays out all night, and arrives home shivering, bedraggled and miserable. The young man takes pity on the cat and decides to warm it up – by putting it in his aunt's microwave oven. Most versions end with the cat 'exploding'.

### Wheeling and dealing

Many contemporary legends relate to the world of business. Rumours that cheap Chinese restaurants use ratmeat or Alsatian dogs are so common that they are hardly taken seriously. News of extraordinarily good deals – the teller claims that his cousin's brother-in-law was able to take advantage of such an offer, or invites his audience to do so – circulates constantly in pubs and bars. One of the best-known of these is the story of the sports car that is going for an incredibly cheap price. There seems to be nothing wrong with it – but everyone who gets into the car notices a strange lingering smell. It turns out that the previous owner died at the wheel – and that the body stayed undiscovered in the car for some weeks.

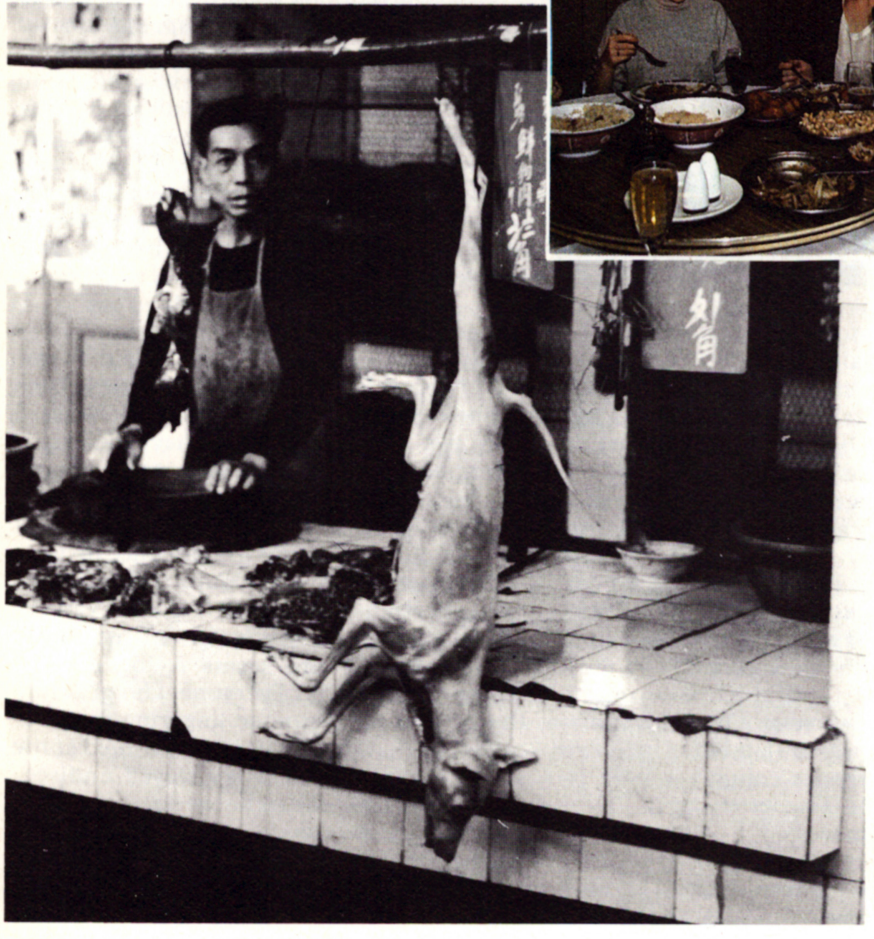
A group of stories that deserve to be considered on their own are those that allege conspiracy on the part of big business. The McDonald hamburger corporation has come

## Let them eat cake

A story from the United States tells how a woman boarded a bus and started handing out cards bearing the recipe for a 'red velvet cake'. She was eager to press the recipes onto people, and when asked why, she explained: she had recently had dinner at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, and had tasted this delicious cake. She had enjoyed it so much that she had sent her compliments to the chef – and, when she returned home, wrote to the hotel asking for the recipe. It duly arrived – together with an invoice for something like $350 from the chef. Her lawyer advised her that she would have to pay the sum he demanded – and the woman apparently thought that the best way to get even with the chef would be to hand out copies of the recipe for nothing.

Variants on this story are found all over the United States. Generally the location of the woman's home town is specific, as is the sum she has allegedly had to pay. The hotel is always the Waldorf Astoria, and the story always includes the recipe for the cake. But is there any truth in the tale?

in for harsh treatment at the hands of legend: early in 1977 the rumour spread that McDonald's was donating a hefty part of its profits to a satanic cult. Hardly had this died down when, in late 1978, another one replaced it, alleging that worms were being added to Big Mac hamburgers to supplement the protein. It was in vain for McDonald's to protest that, pound for pound, worms were actually more expensive than beef – all that could be done was to wait until the story died down of its own accord. Marlboro cigarettes suffered in a similar way when a rumour circulated linking the manufacturers, Philip Morris, with the Ku Klux Klan through the design of the Marlboro pack. There was no truth in the rumour; it was based merely on a highly fanciful interpretation of the pack design.



Left: a Chinese restaurant in Oxted, Surrey – and (below left) the carcase of a dog hanging in a butcher's stall in a market in Canton, mainland China. Rumours that Chinese restaurants serve Alsatian dog meat are so common that they are hardly taken seriously any more – or are they?

Another story concerns parts of mice found in soft drinks. One version, collected in Minnesota in 1976, goes as follows:

> Two old ladies stepped into a restaurant to have a little lunch and . . . ordered Seven-Up. It came in old green bottles . . . they finished their first glass and one of them . . . noticed something kinda towards the bottom of the bottle, and she just couldn't make out what it was . . . finally they tried to pour it out and it came out and it was a decomposed mouse, and they both fainted and they were both revived later on, and after they got home they sued the Seven-Up company, and they made thousands of dollars on the lawsuit.

The curious thing about this particular story is that it is actually based on fact – but on fact some 30 years old, and inaccurately reported.

Professor Jan Harold Brunvald, of the Department of English in the University of Utah, USA, wrote to the Waldorf Astoria in 1965. The reply claimed, 'we have letters and clippings in our files going back more than ten years which give numerous versions of this story. . . . A thorough check was made here at the hotel when the story first cropped up and it is completely false.'

False or not, however, ironically life has begun to imitate folklore: the Waldorf Astoria now distributes copies of the recipe to anyone who asks for them.

Left: an advertisement for Coca-Cola. A rumour that surfaces again and again in the United States concerns parts of mice found in Coca-Cola bottles – an embroidered and amalgamated version of several such cases in which the Coca-Cola corporation has been taken to court

Professor Gary Alan Fine, a scholar of contemporary legend who has made a special study of legends as they relate to court actions, has located a report of the lawsuit on which the story was based:

> On the night of July 24, 1943, plaintiff and her sister went to the Spa Sweet Shop, sat at the counter and each ordered a bottle of Coca-Cola. . . . Plaintiff placed a straw in each bottle. . . . According to plaintiff, the following then occurred: 'When I got half way down, I remarked to my sister, "It had an awful taste to it." She said hers was all right. I kept on drinking, and when I came to the bottom of the bottle, the straw hit something. I picked up the bottle and looked at it, and there was a mouse in it.'

Below left: a roadside advertisement for a drive-in McDonald's hamburger restaurant. During the late 1970s McDonald's had to face the (unfounded) rumour that the meat in its 'Big Mac' hamburgers was being supplemented by worms. It was, of course, in vain for McDonald's to protest that, pound for pound, worms were actually more expensive than beef

Clearly the process of folklore has here taken over from legal and newspaper reports to make a more vivid – if less accurate – story. But the story impugns the wrong product – and, as for the claim that the plaintiffs made 'thousands of dollars on the lawsuit', Professor Fine's researches show that the average amount of money to be made in such was more likely to have been around $1000. Such exaggerations are part of the stuff of contemporary myth.

Are tales of the paranormal to be classed with contemporary legends? Certainly they share many of the same characteristics. Often they spread by word of mouth, and lack convincing corroborative evidence. Often, too, the details are vague – the events happened to a friend of a friend, at an indeterminate time and place. To take one example, what of the UFO conspiracy theory (see page 1041)? Is it not uncommonly like the conspiracy stories about big business?

To ask such questions is not to say that reports of paranormal events are mere fiction – any more, or any less, than contemporary legends are fiction. But an analysis of contemporary legend may one day give us some new insights into the paranormal.

# Psi no more?

**The study of the paranormal is no longer regarded as merely the province of cranks. But as it seeks to establish itself as a scientific discipline, what are the prospects for its future? THE UNEXPLAINED asked four eminent contributors their opinion**

THE PRESENT CENTURY has seen the emergence of the new science of parapsychology from the old and honourable tradition of psychical research. All the people we consulted are members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), are actively involved in investigating the often elusive subject of the paranormal – three of them as parapsychologists and one, Archie Roy, professor of astronomy at Glasgow University, in the more old-fashioned capacity of the interested amateur. Archie Roy had this to say:

Psychical research began in earnest with the founding of the SPR in 1882. Its founders believed that in the age in which they lived, an age of unprecedented scientific and technological progress, it was a scandal and a disgrace that systematic scientific investigations had not been carried out to ascertain what reality, if any, there was behind the myriad reports of paranormal happenings.

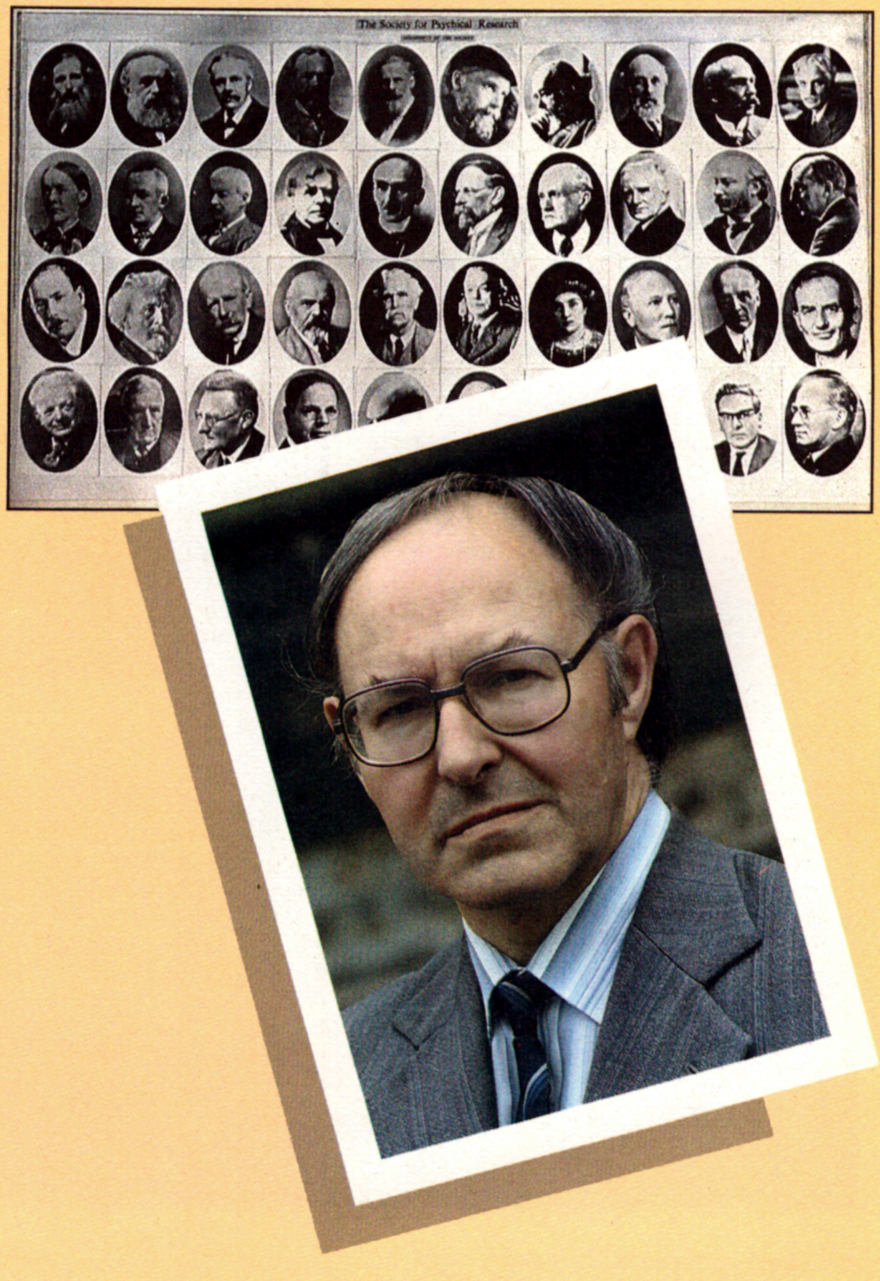
The SPR studied hypnotism, hauntings, poltergeists, telepathy, clairvoyance, premonitions, materialisations and mediumistic communications from the other side of death. Other societies and individual investigators in other countries followed the SPR's example. Physicists, psychologists, physiologists, medical men, professional and amateur stage magicians, philosophers, statesmen and others of the keenest intelligence and highest qualifications have been attracted to the subject, convinced of its outstanding importance as a means of answering the age-old question: 'What is Man?'

No one who has studied with an open mind the enormous number of reports in the proceedings and journals of the societies devoted to psychical research or parapsychology can fail to be impressed by the high scientific standards or by the weight of evidence from both spontaneous and laboratory cases. Crisis apparitions, hauntings, poltergeists, telepathy, precognition, clairvoyance and psychokinesis would have been accepted as real phenomena by the general scientific community long ago if they had had applied to them the usual criteria used for newly discovered phenomena in nature. And yet, after a century of work and half a century of laboratory trials, it is still possible to find people willing to declare that the evidence for the paranormal is minimal or non-existent.

The aim must be to make parapsychology so thoroughly accepted as a serious scientific discipline that sceptics who now hesitate not at all to make blanket disparaging remarks about sloppily designed experiments, imbecilically gullible investigators and widespread fraud will lose whatever reputation they possess if they continue to pronounce upon the subject in such terms.

This will not come about, I think, through continually trying to design the perfect fraud-proof experiment. In no other branch of science do scientists bother to do this. The emphasis is generally on the fact that a researcher's work should be capable of replication in other places, by other people suitably trained, in similar circumstances. Achievement of this in parapsychology would do far more to hasten its acceptance than has most of the work of the past century.

The creation of a fruitful theoretical basis to guide future research and make sense of the wide – and, at present, perplexing – variety of paranormal phenomena would also




Bottom: Archie Roy, professor of astronomy at the University of Glasgow. His involvement with the world of the paranormal is that of the interested amateur; his leisurely and disinterested approach has much in common with that of the pioneer members of the Society for Psychical Research (below, some of the society's former presidents). Archie Roy believes that today's parapsychologists should concentrate on creating a theoretical framework for parapsychology

encourage more scientists to take the subject seriously. 'Facts, without a theory, are merely a mob,' said one of the founding fathers of the SPR.

Fortunately, there are definite signs that with our rapidly growing understanding of the human mind and brain, and with our powerful technological aids such as computers, electroencephalographs, video- and tape-recorders and so on, we may be able to achieve these two goals before so very long. Psychical research, still the Cinderella science after 100 years, may yet go to the ball.

### Predicting the unpredictable

Julian Isaacs, one of the younger generation of parapsychologists, was in 1983 researching into paranormal metal-bending at Aston University. He took up the theme of the recognition of parapsychology as a science:

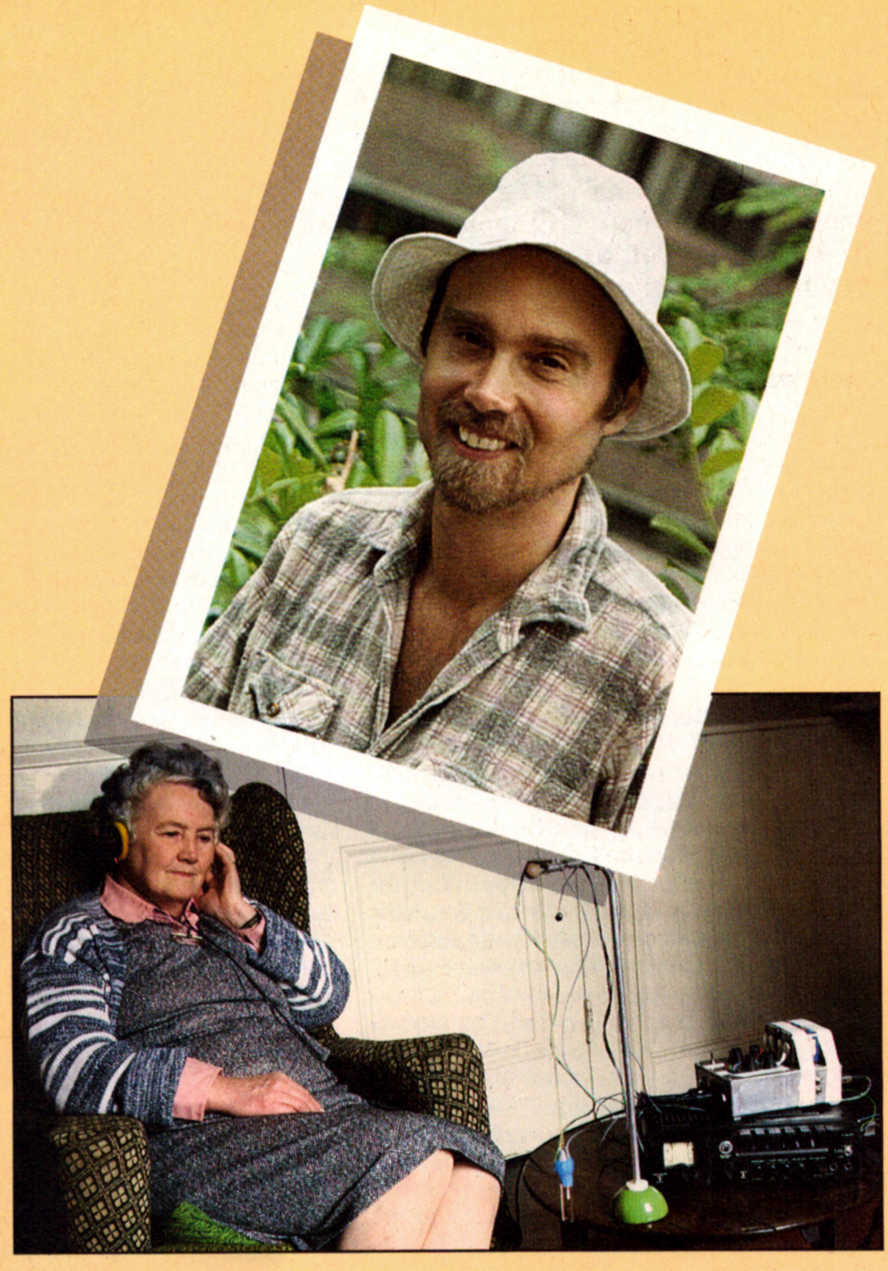
The future of parapsychology is completely unpredictable. Its rate of progress and prospects are largely dependent upon its acceptance by the academic community, and when this will happen is impossible to estimate. Parapsychology is far less widely accepted as a scientific discipline in Britain than in the United States, and this situation looks set to continue.

A breakthrough in the theoretical understanding of the physics of psi still seems a long way off. But since paranormal phenomena are undoubtedly real, the study of them will not go away; it must eventually be accepted, even if this takes another generation or so to achieve.

Meanwhile, progress in the psychological understanding of specific limited areas of the study of the paranormal continues to be made. The Ganzfeld method (see page 1430) represents a powerful and promising technique that looks as if it may yield repeatable results – which would be a major gain for parapsychology. It seems likely that research into bringing out the latent psi abilities in ordinary people will continue. Rex Stanford's PMIR formulation (see page 1570) has introduced a new and productive way of looking at spontaneous psi and may generate further research to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon. New approaches being adopted in a number of areas surrounding the problem of the survival of death may change our concepts of what life after death might be like.

Perhaps the most pressing need of parapsychology is for more accurate, controlled and reliable psi performance. This demands further development of psi training techniques that are now in their infancy. Using psychokinesis (PK) tasks and better detection methods than those now in use will, it is to be hoped, hasten the development of PK training techniques, which in turn may produce new insights into the neurophysiology of PK and thereby of psi in general.

If a significant real life use for psi were to be developed and its use were to become a commonplace practice, there would be no need to prove its existence. The demonstration of controllable and meaningful use for psi in everyday life would, it is to be hoped, stimulate interest on the part of the authorities that provide funds for research, and perhaps prompt them to release financial resources for parapsychology.



Top: Julian Isaacs, in 1983 Britain's only full-time researcher into paranormal metal-bending, in a project at Aston University. Like other researchers in the field of the paranormal, Julian Isaacs is concerned that parapsychology should be recognised as a science. He proposes developing a practical use for psi that would demonstrate the existence of the phenomenon: a 'psi-phone' (above) in which sounds resembling human speech would be produced by psychokinetically applying pressure to piezoelectric crystals wired up to headphones

### Success and failure

Sue Blackmore, in 1983 researching out-of-the-body experiences at Bristol University, adopted a point of view startlingly different from those of our other contributors:

I look forward to the future of parapsychology with mixed feelings. It could be very exciting – or else the science of parapsychology could crumble rapidly into insignificance.

My misgivings are based on a decade of research in parapsychology. After many years of refusing to make up my mind, I have

finally concluded that there are no psychic phenomena, no inexplicable communication through telepathy or clairvoyance, no influence of 'mind over matter' and no spirits coming back from the dead to haunt us. Few readers of *The Unexplained* will agree with me, but I can only state my opinions and add that I may be proved wrong.

However, if I am right, where does parapsychology stand? Under the narrowest definition, which includes only extra-sensory perception (ESP) and PK, it seems to me inevitable that the science will fade away as further experiments reveal the emptiness of its ideas.

Under a wider definition, however, parapsychology may have a vital role to play. Over half the population of Britain believes in the existence of ESP; even more believe that after their death something will survive; and many believe unshakeably that they have actually experienced paranormal events. Why? A wider approach to parapsychology should seek to answer this crucial question – but how?

I am assuming that the answer is *not* that these beliefs are valid. Instead, we need to investigate how people acquire erroneous beliefs. Psychologists realise that this happens all the time because of distortions of memory, the desire to believe and because people misunderstand the concepts of probability and chance. For example, if you have a dream about going to Holland and the next day receive a letter inviting you to go there, you may decide that you have had a premonition. You may judge that the coincidence was too unlikely to be 'just chance'. But was it? There are so many factors to consider that it is impossible, even in theory, to work out the probabilities involved – and yet this is the kind of event that convinces people of the existence of the paranormal.

There is, however, a much more important matter. Psychology is nowhere near understanding mystical, transcendent or religious experiences – experiences in which people seem to be taken out of themselves, in which they glimpse a higher world, or experience things that have a profound emotional impact on them. They may afterwards feel that they are better people – indeed, they may actually become better people as a result of their experience. I believe that these experiences are real and important, but that the usual explanations of them are wrong.

I start by assuming that the human brain has the capacity to create hallucinatory 'other worlds' that reflect the structure of our imagination. We have hardly begun to explore these worlds. I think our hope for the future lies in seeing Man as a spiritual machine – with no psychic powers, no recourse to other worlds 'out there', no power to produce paranormal feats – but a machine capable of mystical experiences, of selflessness, love and compassion. Understanding that may teach us why people believe in the paranormal.

If I am right, parapsychology in the narrow sense may simply disappear. But if we are prepared to broaden our horizons, parapsychology has an exciting future ahead.

### What counts as psi?

Finally, Carl Sargent, whose work on telepathy and the Ganzfeld state at Cambridge University is well-known, contributed a highly personal survey of the present and future of parapsychology:

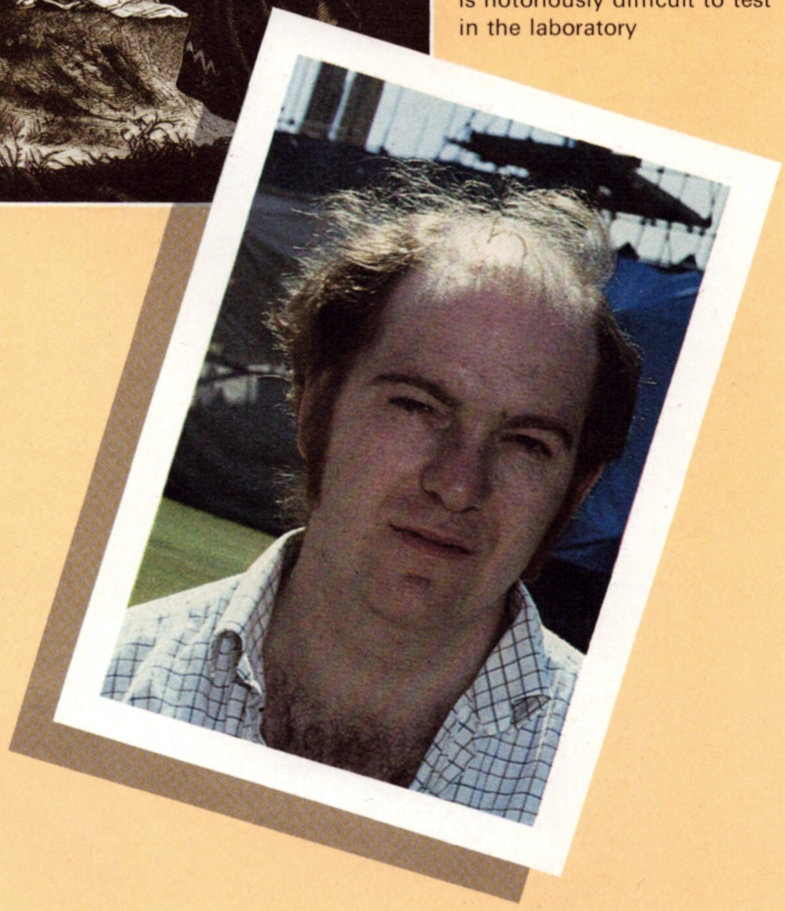
Parapsychology is beset by several major problems. Not the least of them is, just what areas of study count as parapsychology? Does it include ufology, astrology, Kirlian photography? Where are the boundaries?

Below: Dr Sue Blackmore, whose decade of research into parapsychology – she was in 1983 working on a study of out-of-the-body experiences at the University of Bristol – has convinced her that psychic phenomena do not exist. She points out the difficulty of evaluating psychic phenomena – what, for instance, is the probability of the biblical Joseph's premonitory dream (right) having occurred by chance? It is impossible to say

There is no agreement about exactly what it is we are looking at.

Neither is there agreement about how to study the things most psi researchers would consider legitimate areas – telepathy, precognition and so on. Is it even possible to study precognition as such or could all precognition be PK? Could all telepathy be clairvoyance? Could all ESP be PK? Some of this, I suspect, is mere playing with words, but these problems do affect the way research is done.

There are real divisions in parapsychology about the value of spontaneous cases. Is there really any point in collecting more ghost stories when Myers and his colleagues did it all (and usually better and more comprehensively) 100 years ago? I think not – but newer areas, like near-death experiences and out-of-the-body experiences, which have, until now, been relatively little researched, are another matter.



Below: Dr Carl Sargent, who has used Ganzfeld techniques extensively to test telepathy at the University of Cambridge. He confesses that he has become convinced that experimental work in parapsychology is of limited value – real psi, after all, happens spontaneously outside the laboratory. Precognition, for instance, apparently occurs often in real life and was once widely accepted (left: Numa, King of Rome, consults the oracle Egeria around 715 BC); but it is notoriously difficult to test in the laboratory

Within experimental parapsychology, it is still true that many of the tests used are very artificial, and even meaningless outside the laboratory. I have used such tests myself, and there is a place for them – but their role should be limited. There are few convincing excuses for not using imaginative tasks that feel 'real' to the subjects – but one excuse is worth considering. Complex picture-guessing tasks that may be less artificial than guessing cards or random numbers tend to give less precise results, and are more time-consuming. Our rate of progress will, unfortunately, be slowed if we use more 'real' tests for ESP. But maybe the progress we make will be toward more meaningful, reliable models of how ESP works in its natural setting – which, experimenters should never forget, is *outside* the laboratory.

## Public relations

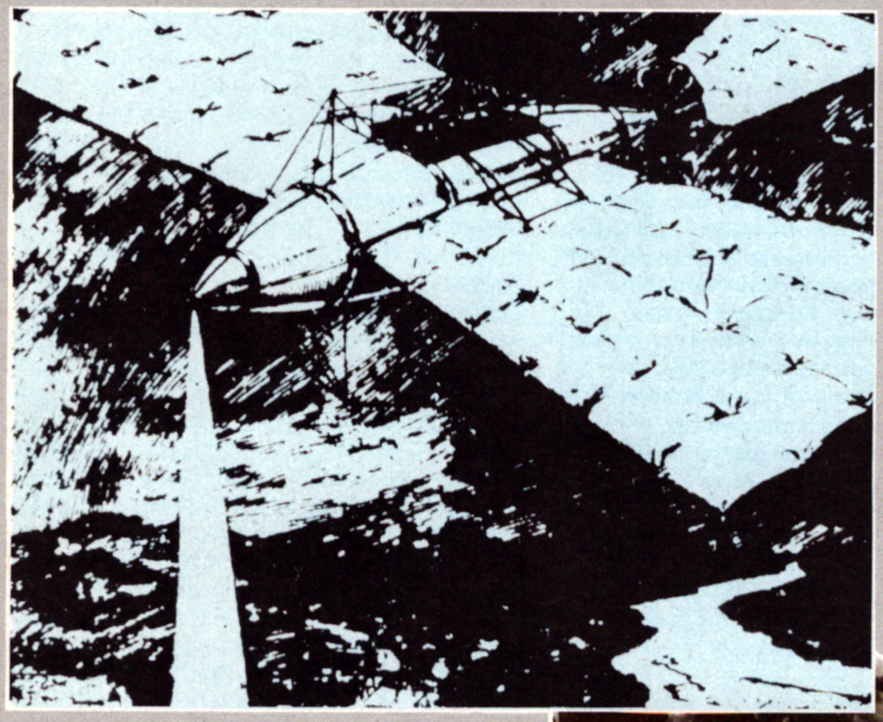
It is also clear that parapsychology needs to continue building links outside itself – with the media and with the general public. I think we have, in large part, been wasting our time with sceptics and academics. The most powerful motivation for bothering with them was, of course, that they control the purse-strings for funding scientific study, so parapsychologists set out to persuade them of the value of psi research. Predictably, it was mostly wasted time. There *is* an alternative strategy – to go over their heads to the real paymasters, the general public. They should be told how much is spent by government each year on funding psi research on the one hand and, say, rat food for experimental psychologists on the other. Then, perhaps, the public would demand a greater say in how their money is spent.

As far as I myself am concerned, I have only just realised that much of my own work has really been directed towards satisfying my own curiosity as to whether or not psi exists. Since I find that it does, I find laboratory studies frankly increasingly tedious. I can't see the point; I have never thought the techniques of experimental psychology – a bloated pseudo-science if ever there was one – had much to say about human behaviour in real-life settings, and I am increasingly dubious about how much experimental parapsychology has to tell us about the *why* of psi. And perhaps it is a side effect of reaching the vast age of 30, but the survival problem – where laboratory research is 99 per cent irrelevant – seems now to me to be the central one, not only of parapsychology, but of the meaning of human life itself.

But that is much too profound a note to end on; parapsychology is after all, for me, still a bad second to a decent hundred by Ian Botham.

# Somewhere over the rainbow

**Timelessness and a feeling of dislocation have been reported by those involved in close encounters with unidentified flying objects. JENNY RANDLES offers a new explanation for this sense of alienation from reality, which she terms the 'Oz factor'**



UFO sightings change with the times: in the 1890s airships were seen, like the one (below) in California in 1896; after films such as *The day the Earth stood still* (right), made in 1951, aliens and spacecraft were more frequently reported

THERE HAS BEEN SERIOUS STUDY of the UFO phenomenon since 1947. But one of the most frequent comments made on ufology is that no progress whatsoever has been made during this time. We are no nearer a solution, it is said, than on the day when Kenneth Arnold first encountered a formation of discs over Mount Rainier in Washington State, USA. This dismisses out of hand what has been achieved, which includes, for instance, the following discoveries.

First, the simple, obvious solutions (for example, Russian secret weapons, alien spacecraft, mass hysteria) do *not* work. The real situation is more obscure.

Second, we now realise that there is not just one UFO phenomenon but two, at least. On the one hand there are physical phenomena, involving energy behaving in poorly understood ways. These are called unidentified atmospheric phenomena, or UAPS, to distinguish them from the other kinds of UFO, in which interaction with human beings is involved.

Third, we have recognised the social dimension to the UFO enigma. The phenomenon is not a fixed thing. It changes with the times and perhaps has done so for centuries. The airship waves of the 1890s in the USA and those in 1909 and 1913 in Britain showed the UFOS keeping one step ahead of current technology. The apparent similarities between ancient fairy lore of many cultures and modern UFO entity sightings is another example. Note also the way that UFO aliens, according to the contact claims, no longer come from the solar system but from other stars or even galaxies, now that our space probes have shown no kind of advanced life on any of our sister worlds. The influence of science-fiction movies is relevant, too. *The day the Earth stood still* (1951) used the motif of electromagnetic interference with vehicles, before claims of this effect occurred in the UFO accounts.

Fourth, it has been realised that identified flying objects (IFOS) are of great significance. Since more than 90 per cent of reported UFOS are identified, it was always foolish just to

In the film *The wizard of Oz* (1939) Dorothy and her dog Toto (bottom, in a scene with the scarecrow) were transported out of their everyday life to the land of Oz by a whirlwind. People who have encounters with UFOs often feel sucked out of the real world into a void – hence the term 'Oz factor'

dismiss them. Now there has been closer study of intriguing mistaken cases, in which, for example, several witnesses were fooled by a commonplace sight such as the Moon into experiencing a very bizarre close encounter. This has led to fresh insights into the nature of the UFO phenomenon.

Ufology is diversifying into a variety of subdivisions. For instance, the scientific study of UAPs may become a field of research on its own. UAPs, however caused, seem to be amorphous balls of energy that emit broadband radiation. They could be related to ball lightning, whatever atmospheric physicists eventually prove that to be (see page 218). Indeed, ball lightning may just be a subcategory of UAPs, rather than the reverse. Another important kind of UAP may be a piezoelectrical impulse squeezed from the ground into the atmosphere (see page 2302). These lightforms may or may not be proved to exist, but such theories are at least providing ufologists with testable hypotheses.

Whereas UAPs may be seen by a number of independent observers, UFOs of the other kind are very often totally subjective, or else perceived only by a small number of witnesses who are associated with each other and who occupy a small area. But there is speculation – by, for example, researcher Dr Michael Persinger – that UAP events may be able to account for the more mysterious UFO close encounters as well.

Persinger has proposed that the radiation emitted by the UAP interferes with the brain functioning of any percipient who is close enough to it (that is, within the phenomenon's 'sphere of influence'). This triggers hallucinatory experiences, which also feature unconsciousness, trauma, time loss and pseudo-memories of an alien encounter, which are personally relevant but individually variable. They are stimulated by the interpretation of the event (made in the seconds before the UAP/brain interaction takes place) in terms of a culturally conceived 'alien device'. Many years ago the same phenomenon would have been culturally conceived as demonic, or as from the fairy realm, during the same moments of interaction. Hence the durability and chameleonic tendencies of the UFO mystery.

Dr Alvin Lawson and William McCall have attempted to prove an origin for this subjective material in terms of repressed memories of the birth process (see page 2086) Some factor such as this, present in all cases, is necessary to explain the otherwise puzzling threads that interlink stories of alien contact from so many different countries. For the UFO enigma is world-wide in extent and highly consistent.

The foregoing research may be all that is necessary to establish a basic understanding of the UFO enigma. However, many problems remain. Why are there cases of gross distortion of normal stimuli, precipitating extraordinary close encounters? Why does there appear to be a connection between close encounter witnesses and psychic phenomena? Why do close encounter witnesses often become 'repeaters', having frequent UFO contacts, frequently from childhood?

Such difficulties, among others, give one cause to speculate as to whether a better, all-embracing, theory, or an additional theory to encompass the remaining cases, may yet still be necessary. One important clue regarding this may be the existence of what is called the 'Oz factor'.

While so far this article has summarised widely known ufological research that commands general support, the ideas that follow stem from the developing research and personal hypotheses of the author, and so may not, as yet, be taken as more than that.

### Off to see the wizard?

The Oz factor consists of a set of features that stand out among UFO close encounter reports. Individually these have been recognised for several years, but nobody has sought to tie them together into a collective experience. The following typical quotations from close encounter witnesses sketch in the outline of the Oz factor: 'All sounds around me suddenly ceased . . . it was like being at the bottom of a very deep well.' 'I felt isolated and alone, suddenly not a part of the environment.' 'It was as if I were half in this world and half out of it.' 'Time seemed to slow down and then stand still. As this thing passed over it literally took ages to do so.'

Essentially the Oz factor is a sense of timelessness and sensory isolation; the witness feels as if the UFO has temporarily sucked him out of the real world and into a

kind of void where only he and the phenomenon co-exist. The name was given by analogy with the experience of Dorothy and Toto, who in *The wizard of Oz* were taken by a whirlwind to the land of Oz. The extent of this experience in the UFO records makes its importance obvious, for it is not something that investigators generally seek out. Rather it is reported spontaneously.

Often a witness will come out of an encounter suffering considerable confusion about the length of time it has lasted. Indeed, it seems perfectly reasonable to suggest that cases of time loss or time lapse in contacts and abductions are merely the result of the Oz factor. This might very well suggest that many close encounters (possibly all) involve some degree of the Oz factor, memory distortion and time loss. After all, a time loss of three or four minutes during a typical UFO experience could easily go unnoticed. Memories retrieved hypnotically from time loss cases imply that some kind of 'message transfer' has taken place during the 'lost' time. There is a disturbing consequence to be drawn from all this. A message transfer might be present in all UFO close encounters – indeed the encounter itself might be a side effect. But in the majority of instances this transfer, if it does take place, is never even suspected by the witness. It takes place beyond his normal conscious awareness.

## Universal factor

The existence of the Oz factor certainly points towards the consciousness of the witness as the focal point of the UFO encounter. For it is clearly here that the effects take place (whatever their cause). That this is so receives further vindication from an unexpected source: the Oz factor is not confined to UFO cases. Consider this description:

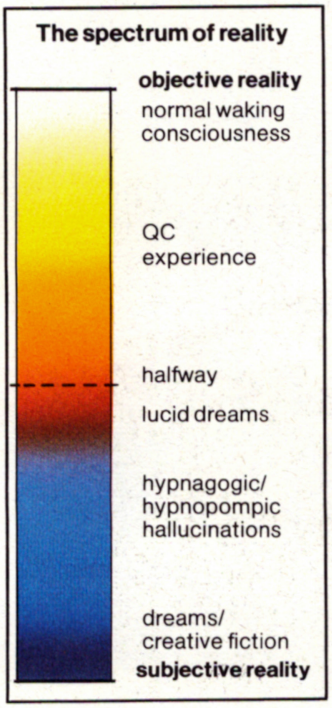
> I got this cold feeling . . . and I raised myself on my elbow. I could not hear the clock ticking and it was only a foot away from me. Everything was – how should I explain it? – like everything had stood still. . . .

This account comes from a witness about to see a ghost. It evidently shows the Oz factor. Similar features have been detected so far in, for instance, out-of-the-body experiences, timeslips and precognitive visions. As the only obvious common denominator between all of these things is the mind of the percipient, suspicion once again must be directed at consciousness. This is the stage on which the events are acted out.

Since the UFO close encounter and those other paranormal phenomena seem to have correspondences, if not necessarily exactly the same origin, a general name is required for them. The term quasi-conscious experience (or QC experience) has been adopted, as these experiences do come in the guise of normal reality and yet, in some ways, are very clearly not this.

## Broad band of reality

A number of researchers, such as Patricia Austin and Hilary Evans, have suggested that we need a 'spectrum' to describe various facets of reality, and a development of this idea has proved invaluable in this connection. What we might call the 'spectrum of reality' would stretch from totally subjective experience, such as dreams, to totally objective experience, such as everyday waking consciousness. Both these extremes are in




Above: on the 'reality spectrum' the QC (quasi-conscious) experience lies on the upper half of the scale between objective reality and subjective reality. Close encounters, out-of-the-body experiences, timeslips and precognitive visions all appear to be quasi-conscious experiences

Right: American airline pilot Captain E. J. Smith uses a dinner plate to illustrate the flying saucers he saw on 6 July 1947 over Oregon, USA

Left: a cartoon from a Sheffield newspaper in 1913 shows the genesis of an airship sighting in the north of England

Below: this disc-like object emitting a vapour trail was photographed over Namur, Belgium, on 5 June 1955. According to the theory of quasi-conscious experience, subjective data may manipulate objective reality to such an extent that an image such as this can be projected by the human mind and subsequently photographed

fact subject to 'interference' from other parts of the spectrum. For example, objective environmental factors, such as a cold breeze or loud noise, may affect a sleeper and make an appearance in another form in the subjective world of his dreams.

The gulf between the two ends of the spectrum is far from empty. Lucid dreams, in which the dreamer is aware that he is dreaming and maintains some degree of control over the dream imagery (see page 588), seem to locate themselves towards the subjective end of the spectrum, but closer to the middle than the ordinary dream. Other phenomena, such as hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations (the vivid images seen on the brink of sleeping and waking), require to be placed towards the subjective end of the spectrum also.

The QC experience fills what is otherwise a somewhat disconcerting gap on the spectrum between the middle and the objective end. Had we not known of it, we might have been tempted to invent it to prevent a lack of balance. The QC experience may actually occupy quite a broad band of the spectrum – not just a narrow one – but it is best appreciated as a kind of mirror image of the lucid dream. Whereas in a lucid dream *objective* information coming in from outside manipulates the *subjective* dream reality, in the QC experience the reverse occurs: the *subjective* information manipulates what is experienced as *objective* reality.

This need not be seen as mind literally altering matter (although this remains an interesting possibility in view of quantum physics and brain/mind psychology, both of which may in some circumstances permit reality to be what our consciousness decides it to be). Possibly, in very rare instances, reality is manipulated sufficiently strongly to allow a photograph to be taken revealing the fact – and this may account for the few seemingly unimpeachable shots of UFOs. However, just as the lucid dream is less common than the simple hallucination, such an extreme QC experience may be much less common than the normal kind. Usually the manipulation of reality is not external, in the sense that it is visible to others, or could be photographed, but takes place *within* the sensory systems of the percipient. What we perceive of the outside world is largely what our brain interprets from incoming signals. That is why optical illusions occur, and continue to occur even when we *know* we are being fooled. And so, under the influence of a QC experience, our eyes might 'see' the Moon but our mind might 'experience' a UFO close encounter. Subjective information from some source has over-ridden the perception of objective reality to create the distortion: hence the very puzzling IFO cases. The overwhelming majority of close encounters might, on this basis, be reducible to ordinary stimuli seen 'under the influence', as it were.

Obviously, much work needs to be done to make progress with these hypotheses. But if they are correct, we need to explore the origin of the subjective data that over-ride objective reality. It could be internal (from a deeper level of ourselves) or external (for example, from some other intelligence). It may even be both.

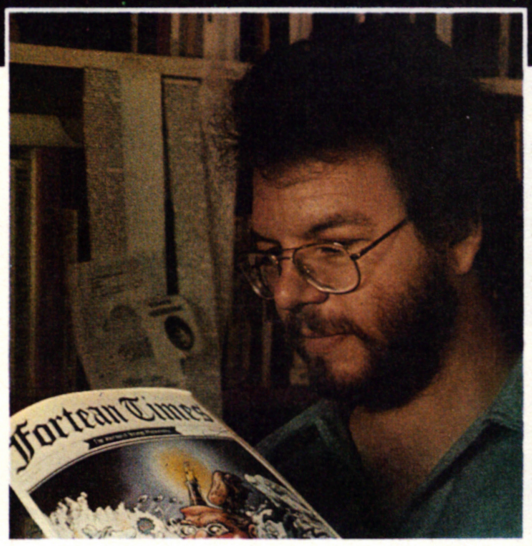
### A high-pitched buzz

If alien intelligence does exist, it is most unlikely to use primitive technology such as radio telescopes. The intelligence may not have eyes or ears, for example! But consciousness itself may be the true radio telescope of the cosmos. On this basis, mind to mind chat shows may be going on around us all the time, while we search forlornly with our multi-million-dollar radio telescope toys. Only a few people (the psychic repeater witnesses?) may have sufficient receptiveness to 'tune in' to these cosmic conversations. If we did pick up such messages, our minds would be forced to replay them in terms of ideograms from our memory store (based on cliché interpretations of science fiction films and little green men). Each individual may produce a different picture, based on his personal image store, but there would be an essential similarity, since our views of what images fit the concept 'alien' are likely to be similar. Since this kind of 'similar but different' pattern is just what we find within the UFO data, we might hope the theory has some merit, despite its admittedly speculative nature.

Ever since that classic sighting by Kenneth Arnold, ufologists' own findings have been gradually eroding the 'extra-terrestrial hypothesis' in its usual form – the theory that 'UFOs are spaceships'. The odd thing is that, now that we have found a number of mechanisms that seem to explain at least some aspects of the enigma in rational terms, we may be heading back full circle to a new but very different alien hypothesis: that UFOs are associated with alien consciousness making contact by way of the human mind.

# Enigma variations

**Why do most scientists reject the existence of Fortean phenomena – such as spontaneous human combustion – despite the overwhelming evidence in their favour? BOB RICKARD assesses attitudes to, and the importance of, the 'impossible'**




HOW SHOULD SCIENCE APPROACH the abundance of astonishing facts of which *The Unexplained* has given a glimpse during its three years of publication? And what in particular is the future of the field pioneered by Charles Fort (see page 1721) – the field of anomaly research? To answer such questions it is necessary to understand the nature of the challenge that this subject matter poses to individuals, to society and to the orthodoxy of science.

Most of us live in the hope that the mysteries that interest us will be solved – if not tomorrow, then in the more distant future. But there is no guarantee of this. The past is littered with unresolved mysteries, which are now little more than curiosities for scholars. Because of the way we are taught to view scientific progress, we naïvely assume that the acceptance of a subject as a legitimate field of study by science is merely a matter of accumulating sufficient evidence concerning it. But the 100 years of existence of the Society for Psychical Research, or the decades of research into UFOs, have led to no real advance in scientific acceptance of the phenomena. Even a work so deserving of respect as Bernard Heuvelmans's *In the wake of the sea serpents* (1958), which thoroughly analyses 587 sightings of marine monsters, has made little impact on conventional zoology. Neither the quantity of scientific evidence, nor the endorsement of eminent scientists – for a great many of these have been associated with the paranormal – is in itself sufficient to gain scientific approval.

It is all very well for scientists to claim, as Carl Sagan did with regard to UFOs, that 'extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence', but no one can agree on either the definition of 'extraordinary' or the nature of the evidence required. Physicists accept the existence of a new elementary particle on the basis of a few faint traces among thousands of photographs; on such evidence the existence of the Loch Ness monster, the bigfoot, luminous aerial phenomena and spontaneous combustion of human beings could have been established many times over. But if anomaly researchers are seeking scientific approval for their work, the arbitrary *ex cathedra* demand for 'extraordinary' evidence will have to be satisfied.

Nevertheless, there are some opponents of the paranormal for whom no amount of evidence, in any form, will be enough. These are the people suffering from the extreme

Left: the faint photographic image of the newly discovered comet Iras-Araki-Alcock, which was first seen to approach Earth in May 1983. According to the editor of the *Fortean Times*, Bob Rickard (below left), this appeared to induce a spate of odd happenings – such as ice falls in the USA and sightings of anomalous pumas in Britain. Do recurring physical events, such as the approach of comets, always trigger waves of weirdness? The *Fortean Times* team hope to discover any patterns in anomalies by computerising their extensive files (right, a small sample), which also include historical happenings such as attested levitations by human beings (below)

Wild dog pack could be 'extinct' native tigers
Bigfoot lives!
Top experts' incredible new clinical evidence proves that . . .
My lover was a ghost
Passionate phantom
UFO PROBE INTO DEAD PONIES RID
CASE FACES
GRAN QUIZ
Jealousy probe may end nanny Carole's ordeal
FAMILY FLEE GHOST THAT HURLS GLASS
The riddle of the poisoned schoolgirls
BOND MEETS AN OLD FLAME
TOMORROW DOUBLE COLOUR
Victims of the Beast
moor
'Dinosaur' photos awaited
Film came from expedition in search of creature
TREE CUT DOWN BELIEVERS CHIP STUMP
Mix-up confirmed after records check
Mothers raised wrong babies
'Lion on run' was a dog
Woman Mysteriously
GIRL GIVES POLICE SKETCH OF BEAST

scepticism that Brian Inglis has called a 'mental illness'. There are many examples: the present author was told by an otherwise rational biologist that he could not accept the idea of levitation even if someone were to rise into the air before his disbelieving eyes. The paranormal certainly seems to touch a raw nerve in most people, especially scientists. The psychologist W.F. Prince studied this topic in his *The enchanted boundary* (1930). He wrote that many normally rational critics became irrational when they crossed the theoretical boundary between the normal and the paranormal. 'They attack and criticise parapsychology in ways they would never dream of using in their own fields of competence.'

The pioneer psychical researcher Hereward Carrington pointed out that scientists reject the paranormal for two main reasons. The first is that, if the existence of paranormal phenomena were proved, it would undermine the status of the laws of science. In this respect all anomalies are potentially subversive. The existence of levitation, psychokinesis, clairvoyance and so on, if they could be reliably and repeatedly demonstrated, would overturn cherished concepts in almost every field of science and technology; after all, who would need cars if all could teleport?

The second reason, according to Carrington, that scientists resist the paranormal is that if they did not 'the way would be open for the introduction in thin disguise of all the magic and superstition which they have fought against so hard and long.' This is a deep and formless fear that we all share. Our sense of identity developed side by side with our picture of the world and how it works, so it is not surprising, psychologically, that a threat to one would appear as a threat to the other and so induce anxiety. Primitive societies dealt with the paranormal in a practical way: they distinguished between the everyday world and a world of magic, spirits and gods. The latter was mortally dangerous territory, but necessary to provide a context for all that was baffling, frightening and clearly abnormal. We cannot turn the clock back by restoring the gods, but we have to evolve a psychologically sounder way of accommodating what the Victorians called the 'unseen world'.

### A consensus reality

But that unseen world is an ephemeral one. Normal life goes on regardless. It is as though there is a powerful force acting to maintain the stability of the 'consensus reality'.

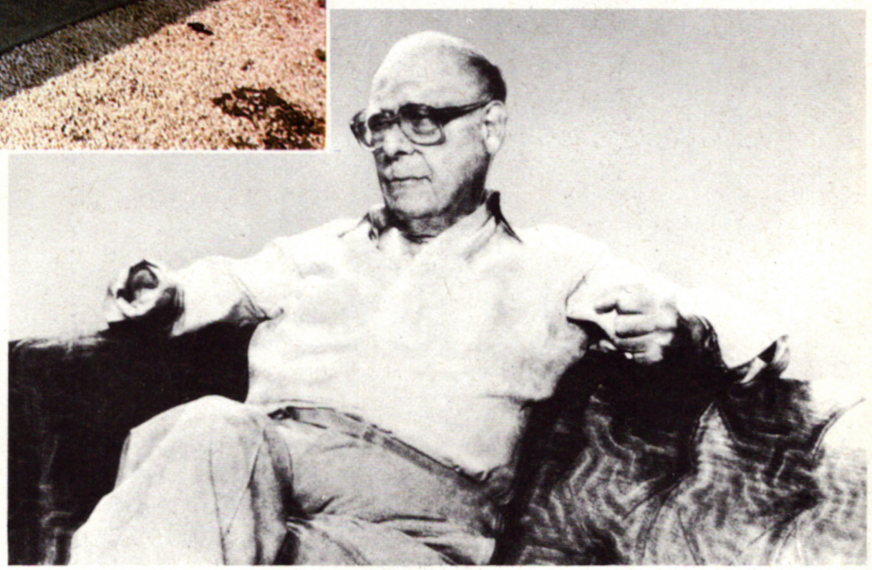
Such a normalising force could take many subtle forms, one of which would be what the psychical researcher G.N.M. Tyrrell called 'the innate pull of nature back towards the sensible world'. This 'pull' could account for the respect accorded to the edifice of scientific theory and the difficulty most of us have in facing up to the evidence for the paranormal.

Anomalies and paranormal events are transient, bubbles of an alternative reality that have no hope of offering long-term resistance to the inertia of the everyday world. Even if we should see something extraordinary with our own eyes – as Professor John Taylor did when he attended one of Uri Geller's spoon-bending events on television – more and more doubts arise as time goes by; we begin to wonder whether we were tricked, by our senses if not by outright sleight of hand. Taylor later publicly recanted his endorsement of Geller and of spoon-bending as paranormal in nature,

and he rejected his own electromagnetic theory of psychokinesis. Tyrrell had himself detected this 'normalising' effect in his analysis of the 1889 'census of hallucinations' conducted by the SPR. He noted that, while experiences of apparitions were more common than one might expect, there was a marked tendency to doubt or suppress one's own experience as time went by.

Jule Eisenbud, a psychiatrist and parapsychologist, suggested that any attempt to bring psi into the foreground will itself create anomalies. Thus the efforts of the laboratory-minded parapsychologists are doomed to produce ambiguous results at best, because the very forces they wish to study will act to disguise or disengage themselves when attempts are made to objectify them.

Any Fortean researcher can sympathise with this view: see the many articles in *The Unexplained* that have mentioned vanishing evidence, cameras and tape recorders malfunctioning at critical moments, and the degeneration of relatively innocuous cases into quagmires of occult and conspiratorial disinformation. If our existence functions like an organism, as Charles Fort believed, then it is not surprising that it reacts to anomalies in the same way that a biological organism reacts to an invader.



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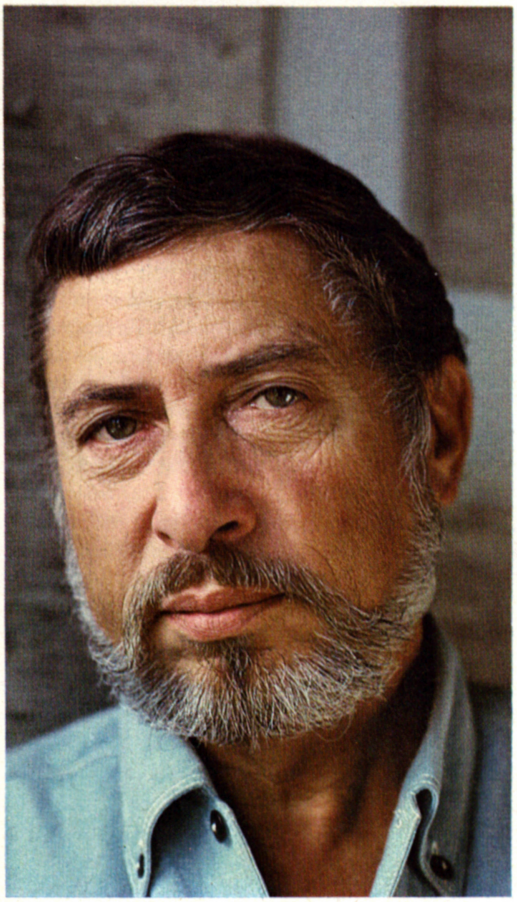


Whether orthodox scientists like it or not, the 'impossible' continues to happen – and sometimes is even photographed. For example, when Neville D'Cruz of Adelaide, Australia, took a picture of his brother and a friend in 1975 (top), no one noticed the disembodied hands clutching Vernon D'Cruz (on the left) – yet there they are. And doctors agree that the fire that burned off Jack Angel's arm (above) in 1982 began *internally*. One scientist, however, who has mixed feelings about such phenomena is zoologist Dr Bernard Heuvelmans (left). He has devoted years to the study of sea monsters; but if he – of all people – found one, who would believe him?

The parapsychologist Lawrence LeShan proposed a general theory of the paranormal that boils down to the notion that how the world behaves depends very much on the way we picture it working. On this the mystics and modern physicists are in remarkable agreement. This point of view is influential in ufology, where there has been a shift of emphasis towards studying the witness as closely as the reported event, but other fields lag behind. Increasingly we are finding that claims of reincarnation, of abduction by ufonauts, and of journeys to heaven and hell tell us nothing about history, life on other planets or life after death, but do tell us a great deal about the human mind. For too long these topics and others, such as fairies, astral projection and demonic possession have been kept separate from each other. It is becoming clear that if researchers in all these fields could compare their cases, theories and methods of investigation, we would see the emergence of a vital new discipline – the study of extreme forms of human experience.

We need to know a lot more about the witnesses of unusual events. For example, there is the mystery of the 'repeaters', people who find themselves witnessing, or even

Left: Paul Freeman, with plaster casts of the footprints of the bigfoot he saw on 10 June 1982 in Umatilla National Forest, Washington State, USA. The evidence for the existence of the bigfoot is steadily accumulating, yet zoologists acknowledge no such animal. It is interesting to note in this context that, in the mid 19th century, explorers' descriptions of gorillas were greeted with derision by contemporary scientists

Below: Roy C. Sullivan who, when a forest ranger of Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, USA, was struck by lightning five times. Here it was only his hat that suffered – but after his retirement he was struck twice further, more seriously. What makes certain people 'repeaters' – witnessing or being the focus for some strange event – over and over again?

being at the focus of, a paranormal event that occurs repeatedly. How do we account for the fate of ranger Roy Sullivan, of the Shenandoah National Park, Virginia, USA, who was struck by lightning on seven separate occasions? The author has learned of someone who experienced two separate showers of frogs. The repetition of such rare events, far beyond all the odds, transcends mere chance and brings us back to the mystery of meaningful coincidences (see page 594).

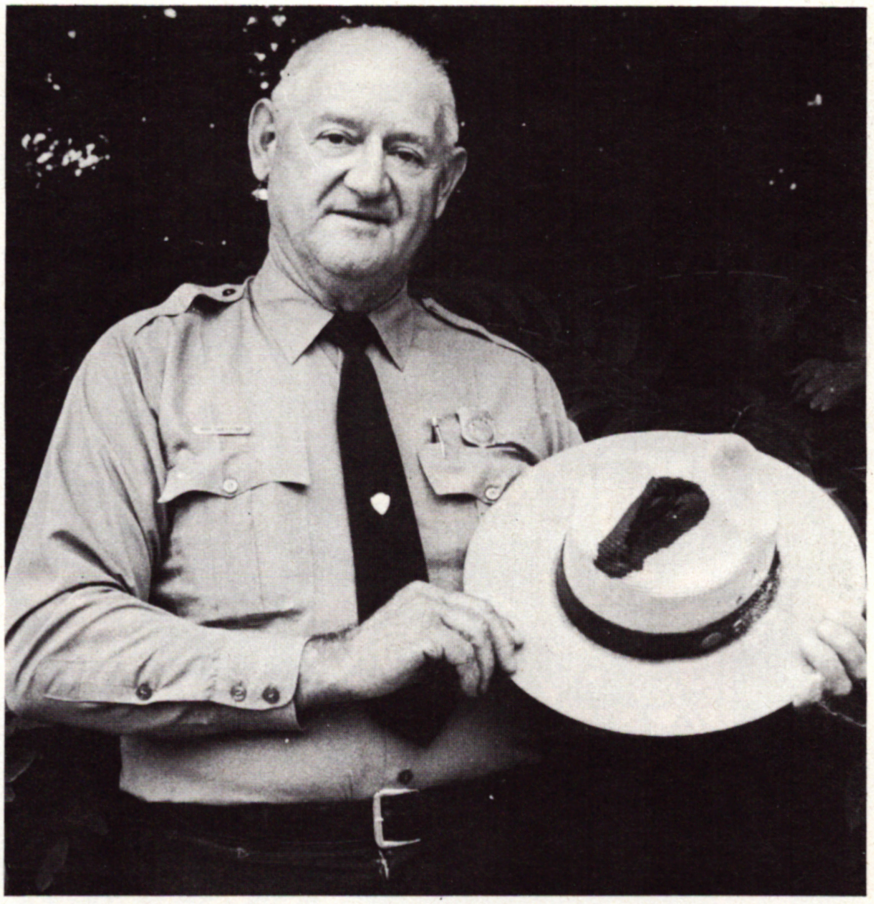
### Keeping on course

Rupert Sheldrake's theory of formative causation (see page 1141) opens up the possibility that some sort of psychokinetic process may be used by living organisms, possibly at the level of the collective unconscious of the species, to guide evolution and development by controlling mutations. Such processes would directly affect the tiniest and most fleeting events – an idea very similar to Eisenbud's on how reality keeps on course. If such processes could be shown to occur, Man could no longer be considered a mere pawn of events, but would have to be seen as adding his own creative force to the forces of normal and synchronistic causation.

It was the French mathematician Henri Poincaré who said that modern Man uses the concepts of causation and determinism in the way the ancients used the gods. We too need to bring order out of chaos. But in the contemporary modern mind the 'unknown' is tainted with all the fears we have ever shoved into that convenient category.

Freud suggested that any new situation that provokes anxiety will also bring up, by association, all the old fears – particularly those 'bad thoughts' that we had as children, before we learned that thoughts and feelings (such as wishing someone dead) do not have the same consequences that actions have. LeShan says that this is another cause of resistance to acknowledging the paranormal – the fear that 'new ways of knowing might reveal to one about oneself [things] that one does not wish to know . . . that are better left in darkness.' In Jungian theory confrontations with the paranormal are equivalent to confrontations with the unconscious. Many kinds of Fortean phenomena can be shown to have archetypal qualities, as though they were the dreams of the collective unconscious unexpectedly materialised.

When scientists see some advantage in pursuing some of the questions raised by anomalies, they will turn to Forteans and other paranormal researchers for the data, and perhaps for guidance. Anomalists owe it to themselves to be rigorous and 'scientific' about their work, but they must do more than merely explain. After all, as Fort himself wrote: 'There never was an explanation which did not need to be explained itself.' Rather we need to *understand*.



# Beyond the fringe

**The popularity of alternative – or fringe – medicine is enjoying a remarkable revival. BRIAN INGLIS examines the reasons for this and looks at the prospects for the alternative therapists in the future**

THE 1970S SAW A DRAMATIC CHANGE in the status and fortunes of the practitioners of alternative medicine. When I first started to do research into the alternative therapists in the early 1960s, it was with the curiosity of somebody investigating an endangered species – one that appeared to be on the verge of becoming extinct. But by the beginning of the 1980s the recession was over: naturopaths, herbalists, osteopaths, chiropractors, acupuncturists and radiesthetists had full appointment books, and very often waiting lists. Was this to be just a temporary boom, which in due course would revert to a slump? Or did it indicate a widespread and enduring disillusionment with conventional medicine?

Before trying to answer that question, it is worth examining the reasons for the earlier decline in the popularity of alternative medicine. By the end of the 19th century it was generally felt that medical science would soon have the means to protect people (by immunisation) from most diseases and to cure them (by drugs or surgery) of the rest. And with the arrival of penicillin after the Second World War, and the introduction of the Salk vaccine against poliomyelitis in 1955, it seemed that the medical profession and pharmaceutical industry were together on the verge of achieving this aim.

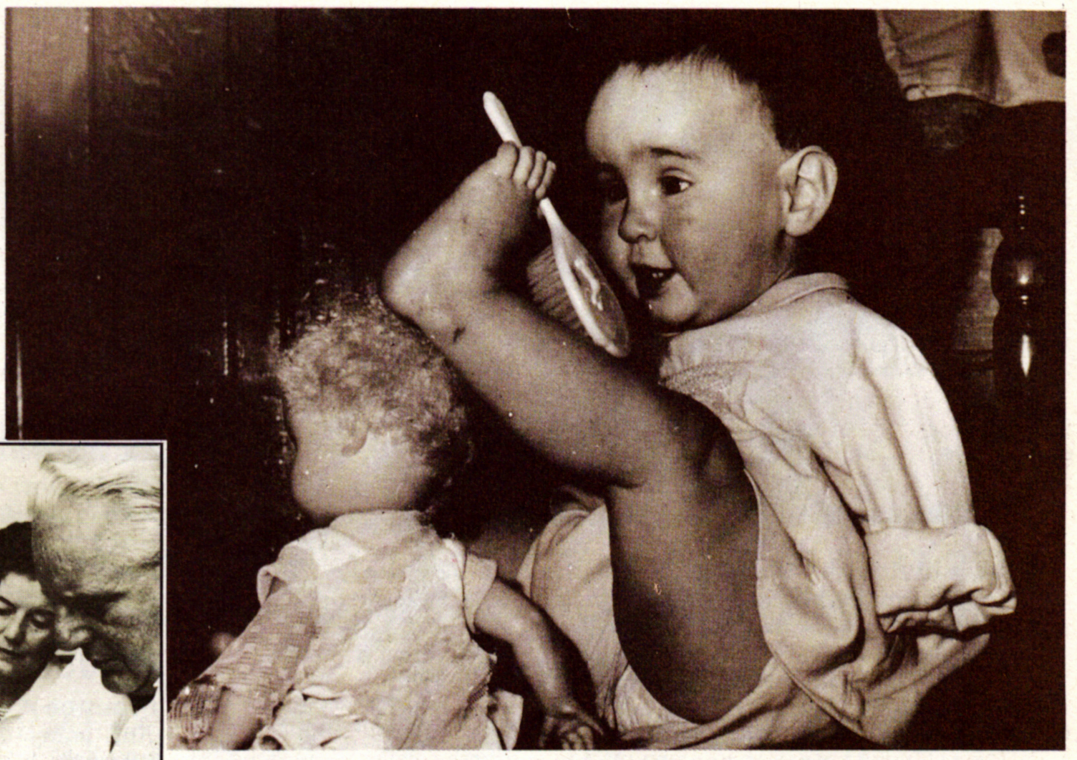
In Britain another important factor was the new National Health Service, established in 1946; under this welfare scheme, any citizen could avail himself of vaccines, drugs and surgery without paying for them. Inevitably, the alternative practitioners were the losers. They could not compete with the 'instant cures' offered by antibiotics; and they had to charge their patients fees.

But although the outlook was bad, all was not lost. Osteopaths continued to flourish; and few large towns lacked a hypnotherapist. And there were still plenty of faith healers, some of whom, like Harry Edwards (see page 1006), had the drawing power to fill London's Albert Hall.

The reason for this was that conventional medicine still had little to offer for certain ailments. The 'wonder drugs' based on cortisone and the steroids, which were going to cure all backache and rheumatoid arthritis, did not live up to expectations. The result was that people with backache continued to consult osteopaths, and many people with arthritis consulted hypnotherapists and faith healers.

The initial indications that the 'wonder drug' era was over came in the early 1960s. A number of drugs had to be withdrawn from use because of their damaging side effects –

A coloured etching by James Gillray (1757–1815) makes a contemporary comment on the introduction of the cowpox vaccine by Edward Jenner in the late 18th century. The cowpox vaccine – used against the disfiguring and often fatal disease smallpox – was the first of a succession of vaccine discoveries that, over the next two centuries, were either to eradicate or bring under control many former killer diseases. Jenner's caricature aptly illustrates the point that all unorthodox forms of medicine initially provoke an adverse reaction



Below: the late Harry Edwards laying his healing hands on little Linda Martell, a sufferer from hydrocephalus. Healers are often successful in curing afflictions such as arthritis for which no fully effective orthodox remedy exists

Above: this infant was one of many born in the early 1960s without arms or legs because their mothers had taken an 'outstandingly safe' tranquilliser during pregnancy; the thalidomide disaster seriously undermined confidence in orthodox drug therapy

thalidomide being the most notorious example. And the realisation was growing that the community as a whole was no healthier than before. In fact if one looked at the number of work-days lost through illness, the number of hospital admissions, and the amount of money spent on drugs, it seemed people were becoming more unhealthy.

By the 1970s the more enlightened members of the medical profession were becoming aware that medical science could not provide protection from all ailments, because it had concentrated too heavily on dealing with disease and not enough on promoting good health. Research into heart disease, for example, had revealed that smoking, incorrect diet and lack of exercise might be responsible. And what use were the new, and astronomically expensive, coronary care units if many heart patients died of heart attacks before they reached hospital?

Other research into the role that temperament plays in making people disease prone, and the way stress precipitates illness, suggested that psychosocial factors might be as important as bacteria and viruses.

In the early 1970s the very foundations of Western orthodox medical science were rocked when teams of doctors from the West were invited to China to investigate acupuncture. For years the medical profession had derided acupuncture and poured scorn on the idea that sticking needles into people could remove pain and banish symptoms; the embarrassed observers returned from China to report that it worked.

Above: Dr Jonas Salk examining test-tubes containing his polio vaccine. When, after the Second World War, the new 'wonder drugs' and vaccines became freely available to all many alternative therapies declined in popularity

### A turn for the better

From that moment the image of alternative medicine began to improve. On the one hand, people were becoming more and more dissatisfied with prescription drugs for the treatment of common disorders: either they did not work very well, or, if they were effective, they often caused unpleasant side effects such as rashes, giddiness, nausea and even more alarming symptoms.

Another reason was that a great many more alternative therapies were becoming available. Some of these came from the East – for example shiatsu ('finger pressure'), a cross between acupuncture and massage. Others came from California; these included rolfing (a deep-massage technique) and the psychological therapies such as primal therapy, encounter therapy and est. All of them shared certain characteristics that made them attractive to people disillusioned with the medical profession.

Many of the alternative therapies are based on the idea of holism: the doctrine that it is the patient as a whole, rather than his symptoms, that needs to be treated. Of course, many orthodox doctors subscribe to this idea too; but very few have the time to put it into practice. An alternative practitioner may insist on taking a detailed case history on a patient's first visit – and this may take an hour or more; he then prescribes on

Alternative therapies such as acupuncture (top) and shiatsu (above) concentrate on treating the whole patient rather than attacking symptoms – and tend to promote positive health as opposed to simply eliminating disease

the basis of this whole-patient profile.

Another emphasis in alternative medicine is on preventive measures, rather than dealing with symptoms. The patient may be advised to switch to a healthier diet, or to stop smoking, or to learn how to cope with stress by practising auto-suggestion, meditation, or yoga. He is also encouraged not to assume the traditional passive patient role; instead he is to regard the preservation of his own health and, to a surprising extent, the treatment of his disease, as a matter for his own individual efforts.

Probably for these reasons, it seemed in the early 1980s that the number of people consulting alternative practitioners was increasing by about 10 per cent a year; and this trend seemed likely to continue.

If alternative therapies are here to stay, it would seem a logical step if, in Britain, they were to be admitted into the National Health Service, either by allowing alternative therapists to practise within the NHS or by orthodox doctors providing the therapies themselves (as, on a small scale, some already do).

But the prospect of alternative therapies being fully integrated into the British NHS is in fact very remote. One reason for this is that the medical establishment is not at all in favour of the idea. Another reason is money: although in the long term the overall cost of the health service might be reduced (since alternative treatments on the whole are much cheaper than conventional ones), the initial cost of the greatly increased manpower would be considerable. And a third reason is that it seems unlikely that the alternative practitioners themselves would want to be incorporated into the health service – they are doing very well as they are.

The question of recognition and qualifications is also fraught with problems. Although some therapists such as acupuncturists, chiropractors and osteopaths have associations that run training courses leading to diplomas (which could be formally recognised), other types of therapist may have no such organisation. And in the 1980s it seems that qualifying by education is becoming increasingly irrelevant, since the trend is that someone qualified in, say, osteopathy, may also practise acupuncture or homoeopathy, or even teach meditation.

### Practice makes perfect?

And many factors that make a successful therapist cannot be measured, let alone taught; these include intuition, the capacity to establish rapport with the patient, and any elusive psychic healing power that may be involved. And, to a greater extent than is realised, the practice of therapies such as spinal manipulation, massage, and the Alexander principle may be an art rather than a craft: the therapist may be able to qualify as a craftsman, but his qualification will not be an indication of his therapeutic skill.

What I should like to see in the future is a continuation of the present situation (in which anyone can practise any form of alternative therapy without formal qualifications) coupled with a system of awarding honorary degrees to those practitioners who have proved themselves worthy of them.

At one time it was possible for the Archbishop of Canterbury to award medical degrees to clerics who practised healing. Perhaps a lay version could be introduced?

## But is it legal?

There are indications that the status of alternative therapies is improving world-wide. In the USA, where in the past alternative practitioners have been relentlessly harassed, chiropractors have now established the right to practise in every state – and the cost of treatment can often be claimed under workmen's compensation regulations or medical insurance. New Zealand has decided that trained chiropractors need not have a referral from a doctor before taking on a patient.

The United Nations World Health Organisation (established in 1948) was for many years rigorous in its defence of orthodoxy. But during the 1970s it showed an increasing tendency to encourage moves to liberate therapists from legal restrictions. The future of the alternative therapies in Europe, however, depends primarily on the attitude of the European Economic Community – and this body has not been over sympathetic to the therapists in the past. In France, for instance, it remains illegal to practise any form of medicine without an orthodox medical qualification. But in other European countries – notably Holland – alternative therapists are gradually acquiring an improved status and formal recognition.

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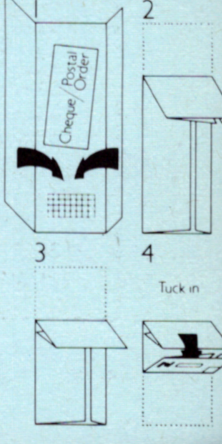

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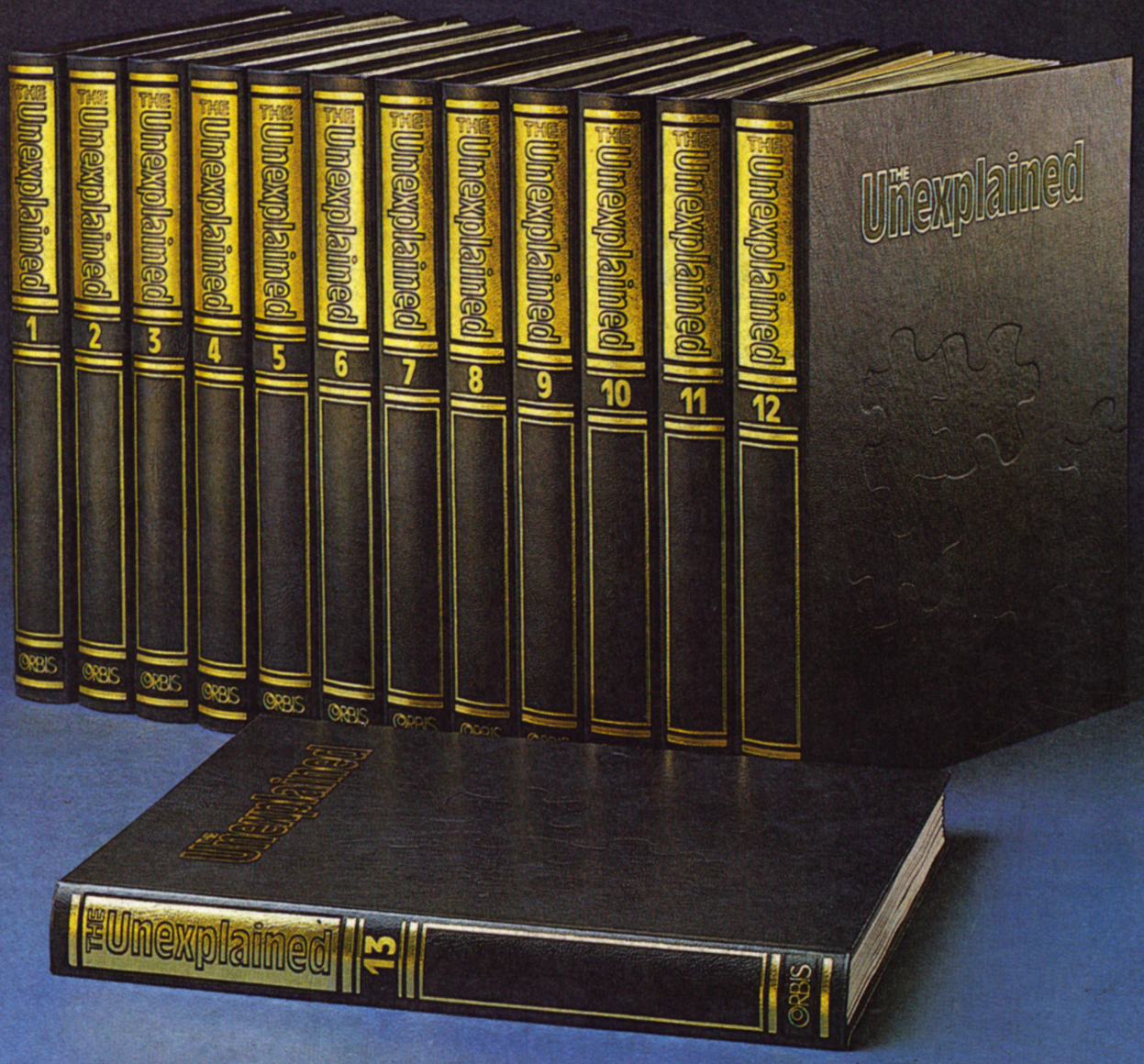


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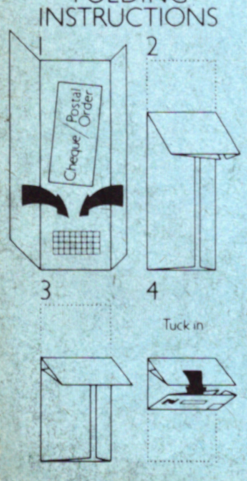


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